



Public Image Ltd. Live at Rockpalast 1983

Directed by Christian Wagner

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By Ian Gormely Recorded between 1981's *The Flowers of Romance* and 1984's *This is What You Want... This What You Get* (on the same tour that yielded 1983's *Live in Tokyo*), *Live at Rockpalast* could be the greatest summation of Public Image Ltd.'s early years, featuring tracks from their first three groundbreaking post-punk classics, as well as their at the time yet-to-be-released dance-pop diversion. But the film – a performance from German television program *Rockpalast* – captures the group on the wrong side of this transition. By the time of the tour, both Keith Levene and Jah Wobble – key to the band's early sound – had left, leaving just John Lydon and drummer Martin Atkins as the only classic-era members left amongst a trio of hired guns (guitarist Joseph Guida, bass player Louis Bernardi and keyboard player Arthur Stead). The song selections are topnotch, but there's a slickness to the playing that rubs against the spacey griminess of their recordings. The band are tight though, and Lydon is at his atonal best, wandering around stage and hopping down into the photo pit while a game crowd of German fans pogo along to every track, particularly the mid-set selection of the Pistol's "Anarchy in the UK." Production-wise, the sound is great, but the video quality quickly gives away the era – there's a distinct videotape feel to the entire proceedings, which is only enhanced by

today's hi-def hardware. Of course, that's part of the appeal, though the lack of ambitious camera work takes away from whatever excitement was present in the performance. The only extras are outtakes from rehearsals of "Annalisa" and "Chant," where the levels fade in and out (only the bass and drums are audible at the beginning) and an interview with Lydon in typical media-whore mode, slagging off the program. Though it just misses the mark, *Live at Rockplast* is a great performance film that sheds more light on a band that remain forever criminally overshadowed by Lydon's previous work.
(MVD)